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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: A MORE HANDS-ON APPROACH TO PARLIAMENT RELATIONS

REF: A. KABUL 2837  
[1](#)B. KABUL 2714

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. After some confusion at the Ministry for Parliamentary Affairs following the transfer of former chief Farooq Wardak to the Ministry of Education and the reluctance of a named successor to accept the job, the office's deputy has taken charge indefinitely, with hopes of dedicating more attention to President's Karzai's often tenuous relationship with the National Assembly. Karim Baz assumed acting responsibilities for parliamentary affairs last week, and brings with him a management style wholly different than Wardak's. Baz is more of a technocrat, with little of the personal connections and flash Wardak employed, but more potential to dedicate himself to the details of legislative lobbying than his predecessor. Baz has said he aims to improve relations with the Lower House's leadership and speed through an ambitious agenda of legislation that has sat dormant for more than a year.

Wardak Moves On, and So Does the New Nominee  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) Karzai transferred Farooq Wardak to the Education ministry two weeks ago as part of a long-anticipated Cabinet shuffle (ref A). Wardak had worn many hats for Karzai's administration, often giving short shrift to his responsibilities for managing the president's legislative agenda. Typical of his style, Wardak utilized a last-minute slew of arm twisting and likely pay offs to win votes for the president's Cabinet nominees. But on routine legislative issues, he was often absent, pre-occupied with negotiations with Pakistan, managing Cabinet meetings, or other duties Karzai had assigned him. The result was an administration frustrated by its inability to move legislation and caught by surprise when Karzai's vetoes were overridden in September (ref B). Wardak's relationship with Lower House Speaker Yunus Qanooni (Kabul, Tajik), in particular, was often strained.

[1](#)3. (SBU) As part of the Cabinet shuffle, Karzai came under pressure to find a place for former Kandahar Governor Assadullah Khalid. Khalid and his supporters, including influential MP Abdul Rassoul Sayyaf (Kabul, Pashtun), had hoped for a major Cabinet assignment, but Karzai was unimpressed by Khalid's stewardship of his home province and offered him what many now see as an offer the president knew he would refuse. After a week of ambiguity, Khalid's true feelings about the new job offer became clear as he left the country rather than accept the helm at Parliamentary Affairs. Karzai then named Wardak's deputy Dr. Karim Baz as acting minister. Although rumors of a second round of Cabinet moves abound, few versions include replacing Baz. Baz himself guesses he will be in the job for the remainder of the president's term.

14. (SBU) Baz, an orthopedic surgeon by training, brings with him just six months' experience as Wardak's deputy, plus 18 more months as the president's liaison to provincial councils with IDLG. However, initial evidence shows he is ready to dedicate far more attention to the details of the job than Wardak. Baz said he is preparing a list of more than 20 bills of top priority for the government and intends to work with Qanooni to develop an agenda to move through the bills one by one. Baz kicked off this initiative last week, bringing the ministers of justice and mines to Parliament to help get a water usage bill on the Lower House's agenda. Qanooni, more willing to listen to the less-politicized Baz than he was with Karzai's right-hand man Wardak, agreed, and MPs worked their way through the bill within three sessions. The last bill addressed while Wardak was at the helm took nearly five weeks to pass. Baz told PolOff he hopes to pass two more bills before the current legislative session ends in December and work through the remainder of his priority list during the next session. For our part, we will meet again soon with Baz to seek his help on our legislative agenda, particularly a number of long-stalled economic and commercial reform bills.

15. (SBU) Despite his meticulous approach to advancing legislation, it remains to be seen whether Baz has the charisma to win over the dominant personalities in a Parliament often less concerned with legislating and more pre-occupied with political theater. Wardak had a clear

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advantage in this regard, and often exploited his personal connections and ability to make deals on the president's behalf in order to win support. Baz has few of his own resources and not nearly the standing with Karzai to bring to this aspect of the job. Instead, he will have to rely on less-flashy tactics of moving bills through committees and on to votes by the whole house. If he is successful, he will help this young Parliament mature into a better-functioning body. If he's not, Karzai's reputation and agenda in Parliament will continue to suffer until a more dynamic personality comes along to line up votes and move legislation through the chaotic legislature.  
WOOD